

A

REVIEW

OF THE

STATE

OF THE

BRITISH NATION.

Saturday, May 19. 1711.

I Never, till now, have presum'd to say I could find one Fault or Flaw, in that Universally, and indeed Deservedly approv'd Author, who we formerly call'd *Tattler*, now *Spectator*; and I believe he will bear with me now, for I shall use him with a just Deference to his Extraordinary Merit, and have as much care of hurting him, as an Occulist should, if he was Conceiving a Cataract.

The Thing, I confess, shock'd me at first View: They say there is a Vice in Nature, that gives a secret Gift of Satisfaction, in seeing our Superiors in any Virtue commit a Mistake, and perhaps I am Guilty of

it with the rest; But the Pleasure I took, quickly transform'd itself into—a Thing we call Wonder—Which tho' they say it is the Property of a Fool, and that a wise Man wenders at nothing, yet it may not be without its Uses in this wise Age.

My surprize in this, was at the Discourse made, *Spectator* N^o 64. . . . about the Folly of our People, in running into Publick Mourning upon the Death of Princes.—Nor am I touching in the least upon his just Reflections on our common People imitating the Court, a Vice, which indeed rises much from a Vanity of being thought to have

have some Business there — But I wonder at two Things.

1. That the *Spectator* should forget or omit, that this Folly is Founded upon Party-Interest in Trade, as much as the Revolutions of the Court are Founded upon Parties in the State; and
2. That he should think any Argument can prevail with People in Trade, where their Interest is respondent.

The Ruin and Destruction of Trade, the Breaches these Publick Mourning's make upon Thousands of Families, whose Employ depends upon the Spring-Trade, and the Fashions of the Town — It all owes its rise to those People, who for their private Gain, at the Expence of their Neighbours, fall first into the Ring, and lead the Dance to the Foolish, the Indifferent, the wou'd-be-Courtiere, and all those, who either for Ease or Expence, or for want of better Cloaths, or to appear like the Court, are pleas'd with dressing in Black; and these are so many, they bear down all before them.

Going the other Day into a Coffee-House, I found a very warm Debate, that had it not ended in a Peaceable Wager, Threatned the Company with something fatal to the Peace — The Case was this; Some-body had started that unhappy Question at a publick Table — Will the Town go into Mourning upon the Death of the Emperor? Alderman Woolpack, the Blackwell-Hall Man, who had a great many Gloucester-Whites on his Hands, answers gravely, *Ay, ay, there's no Question of it, we must all go into Mourning to be sure, you can do no less* — Tom-Taffaty, the Mercer upon Ludgate-hill, a little too pertly replies with a Question — Mourning! For what? For the Emperor, says Woolpack — The Emperor! the Emperor! says Taffaty, repeating the Word; *What's the Emperor to us?* — None but Fools, Fellows that can't go to the Price of new Cloaths, and Hangers-by on the Court, will go into Mourning for the Emperor; *What Relation was he to any Body?* — This

provok'd Esq; Needy, a Gentleman that liv'd near St. James's, and happen'd to sit by — *Sir, says he, You take a great deal of Liberty with your Betters, don't you see the whole Court goes into Mourning? And does not the Queen's Order publish'd in the Gazette say, Such Persons of Quality shall dress in SO and SO, and all other Persons SO and SO, all in Black? Has not her Majesty thereby commanded all People to go into Mourning?* — Taffaty grew hot, fell upon the Esq; pray, says he, *Who gave you Authority to Expound her Majesty's Words? And How do you prove, that by ALL PERSONS in the Publick Order, was meant any other, than all Persons who appear at Court? Let that be how it will, says the Esq; WE think at Court that all the People ought to conform to the Mode that Governs there* — We at Court! says Tom Taffaty, pray Sir, says he, *What are you at Court?* — I suppose you was Gentleman of the Hold-up? Pray when was your Black Coat last scour'd? — Needy draws immediately, and calling him Rascal, demands Satisfaction; Taffaty, a brisk Fellow, gets up — *Ay, ay, says he; I'll give you the Satisfaction suitable to your Quality, tho' not so a Gentleman, and with that, struck up his Heels, took away his Sword, and kick'd him out of the Room* — But it did not End here; Woolpack being a Justice Magistrate, reproves Taffaty, bids him keep the Peace, and the People began to talk of a Constable — But Tom sits down calm — And to it they went with Arguments; Woolpack said the Mourning was no Injury to Trade; that what was lost on one Side, was got on the other; that the Mourning's brought on the Wollen Manufacture; made abundance wear Cloth and Stuffs, that would otherwise wear Silk, and the difference was nothing else, but whether this sort of People or that, should have the Trade? That decency requir'd a Mourning, and he saw no Body against it — Taffaty was still warm, and Argued strongly against it; and at last the Dispute ended in it will be a Mourning and it won't be a Mourning, and cut they pull'd their Money, and laid a Wager.

A grave Gentleman that stood by, after the Dispute ended, coolly put in this Question, pray Gentleman what makes you so hot on both Sides about this Matter, which seems to me of no signification, one Way or other?—*Taffy* Answers him pettily again, *It's of no Signification to you, Sir, but it is quite otherwise to us; this Old Gentleman deals in Broad-Cloth, and he has Ten Thousand Pounds-worth of White Clothes by him, from Worcester-shire and Gloucester-shire, and he cares not who are Ruin'd, if he can but sell his Cloth; I am a Mercer, and I have laid in Ten Thousand Pound-worth of fine new-fashion'd Silks for the Spring Trade, that the Looms have been at Work upon all Winter; and if this Madness goes on, I am Ruin'd, and all the Mercers in London are in a manner Ruin'd; besides the many Thousand Families that depend upon us, and upon the Advancement of a Spring-Trade.*

These Wollen Drapers, and Taylors, and Callicoe-Men, and such Fellows, as soon as ever such a Court Mourning appears, run into all Company, and cry up a General Mourning, and these poor Wretches, such as that *Needy* there, that can't buy a New Coat; or Cloath their Families, or pay the Taylor, and yet will be thought Modish, they all run into Black; and thus they lead the Town into Black, tho' they destroy the whole Trade of a Nation, its all one to them, if their present Gain be but answer'd — And this is the Cause of our Publick Mourning, when the Government has no Hand at all to it—The Honest Gentleman Answers him thus.

Truly Sir, I have heard a great and long Complaint against the Publick Mourning, and as I am a Member of Parliament, I remember it once came before us there, as a Grievance in Trade; but I see now, what hinder'd its being stop'd then, will hinder it still—As some lose by it, so others gain by it—They whose Interest of Trade lay in it, strove to keep up the Custom—eagerly run into it themselves, and oppose any Law made to restrain it — And so it is still, and therefore you may con-

clude it will not be Remedy'd, for Interest lies at the Bottom of it.

This was Illustrated by a like Accident that happen'd at a Christning the other Day, where the Mirth was almost spoil'd by a most unhappy Quarrel between two Ladies, the Case was in short, thus.

The Good Man had bid his Gossips all Wellcome, the Child was made a Christian, and the Parson gone Home, when the Ladies fell to drinking Tea, &c. and by consequence to settle the Nation: *Mrs. Callico* the Linnen Drapers Wife at next Door, and my Lady *Cambrick* the Dutch Merchant's Lady, were all in Mourning, their Linnen fine Lawn, &c. *Mrs. Lustling* the Mercer's Lady, and her Daughter, the Young Lady *Selvaige*, were all in Colours and Lace; they had strong Debates about the Mourning; *Mr. Callico* the Draper, had caus'd his Wife to buy her all new Mourning, for, said he, my Dear, I have rais'd my fine Mullins and Cambricks, at least 3 to 4 Shillings a Yard, in hopes of a Mourning, and all the Drapers and Merchants have agreed, their Wives shall go into the Court Mourning, and make all the Visits they can, and Report at Place, that every Body goes into Mourning — My Dear, says his sensible Wife, I am sorry it happens so, for I am sure it will spoil all the Tradesmen that deal in Silks, &c.—Damn all the Tradesmen in the Town, says *Callico*, Shall not I get 500 l. by it? Hain't I bought three Lots of fine Muslin last Sale? And hain't I six Chests of fine Cambricks and Lawns by me? What's all the Trade of the Nation to me, if I can get Money by it? — Well, Madam like a good Wife, obeys the Voice of her Husband, tho' against her most generous Principles, and she appears in Black, as above.

A long Debate had entertrain'd the Company some Time; the Drapers and Merchants Ladies say every Body goes into Mourning; the Mercer's Lady and her Daughter appear in Colours, Law'd Madam, said my Lady *Cambrick* to my Lady *Selvaige*, Why, you are quite out of the Fashion — What Fashion, Madam, says 'cothes? (*Cambrick*)

brick) Why the Mourning, Madam. *Sel-
vage*, Alas, Madam, there's no Body wears
it but the Court, the Ladies at our Head of
the Town resolve not to wear it, the Park
was all in Colours last Night — The other
Reply'd, all the City went into Black —
Not at all, says Madam *Lustring*, I can
assure you no Body in the City wears Black
but a few Drapers Wives, they say, and
my Neighbour *W—* was fain to Discipline
his Wife, they said, before he could bring
her to it.

This pass'd on, and a long Dialogue. it
came to, when of a sudden, Old *Mrs-
Changeable* the Mercer's Wife, at the Cor-
ner of Street, came into the Room
all in Mourning, which set the whole Com-
pany at Gaze; *Mrs. Lustring's* Colour came
and went, that any Body might see she was
disturb'd; they fell to talk, and the Mourn-

ing being still the Subject, I suppose, says
Mrs. Lustring, Madam *Changeable* is in
Mourning for some Relation — No
indeed Madam, says *Changeable*, but I could
not be out of the Fashion — Tho' you
Ruin'd your Husband, says *Lustring*; I ne-
ver concern my self with that, says *Change-
able* — Such as you seldom do, says
Lustring, and thus they fell out, till it came
to you *W—r* and you *W—r*, and some
thought the Lawn Head in a little Danger
from the Lac'd Head, but Friends parted
them: I abate the hard Words that pass'd,
for the sake of the Manners and Characters
of the Persons concern'd, but it ended in
this — That while Interest guides the Dra-
pers to push on the Mourning, the Mer-
cers will never be able to hinder it, especial-
ly if their own Wives and Daughters run into
Black, when they live by selling of Colours.

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